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Peter Danssaert & Brian Johnson-Thomas

Pentagon Accidentally Arms Al Qaeda Affiliate



A confidential report to the UN Security Council last week revealed that some of the weapons and ammunition supplied to the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces appears to have been diverted to the Al Qaeda affiliate known as Al Shabaab.¹

It seems clear that at least some of the weapons and ammunition so diverted were paid for by the US Government directly² - through cash deliveries³ - to the Somali government since at least 2009, and other weapons have been supplied to Somalia via the Ugandan army which forms the cornerstone of the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

On June 26, 2009 a senior State Department official disclosed during a press conference: "We're essentially doing two things: We have provided funds for the purchase of weapons; and we have also asked the two units that are there, particularly the Ugandans, to provide weapons to the TFG, and we have backfilled the Ugandans for what they have provided to the TFG government.... What we have sought to do is to do - as I said, to provide the TFG with resources to buy munitions and arms. And we have - and to pay for some of their training needs. And we have gone to the Ugandans when the TFG has run short of weapons and ammunition and have told the Ugandans to provide what the TFG needs. When the Ugandans provide those weapons, they give us a bill and an accounting for what they have turned over, and we then give them the money to replace the stores and the arms that they have..."⁴ The equipment supplied includes 12.7mm heavy machine guns, mortars, ammunition, RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenades...⁵

According to Jane's Defence Weekly the United States had up to July 2009 "delivered some USD10 million in arms and ammunition to the Somali forces by way of Uganda"⁶ and was to provide more military support to both the Somali government and AMISOM.

In August 2009 Amnesty International had already warned about accountability and safeguards on arms transfers to Somalia's TFG.⁷ Amnesty International had become aware of "US plans to supply substantial quantities of cash to TFG forces for the purchase of weapons and logistical supplies within Somalia itself. On 14 May 2009 the US government applied for an embargo exemption to supply up to USD\$2 million in cash, to be flown from Nairobi to Mogadishu, for the TFG's National Security Force to procure weapons, ammunition and logistical supplies 'locally'; and thus presumably in part from the Somali arms markets"⁸.

Material support for the TFG has also come through other routes: Yemen has provided AK47s⁹, Djibouti has provided ammunition and RPG shells¹⁰. In regard of at least one shipment the US Ambassador to

¹ U.N. monitors warn of 'systematic' Somali arms diversion, *Reuters*, 13 February 2014.

² "Assistant Secretary Carson assured President Sharif that the U.S. stands behind the TFG. He said the U.S. will continue to provide support both directly and through Uganda and Burundi". Uganda: Assistant Secretary Carson's Meeting With Somalia TFG President, Cable 09KAMPALA1280, 5 November 2009. (See Wikileaks for cables.)

³ "Embassy urges that the Department authorize a second tranche of USD 500 thousand in funding to the TFG. In Embassy's judgment, the initial tranche of USD 500 thousand, which the TFG has fully accounted for, made a key contribution to the success of the TFG's current counter-offensive. In addition to permitting it to pay its troops, and purchase weapons and ammunition... the rapidly-evolving security situation and the urgency of capitalizing on the TFG's fragile advantage in our view mandate that cash grant assistance be immediately provided." Somalia - Urgent Need for Funding as Fighting Continues in Mogadishu, Cable 09NAIROBI1107, 4 June 2009.

⁴ *Background Briefing on U.S. Assistance to the Somalia Transitional Federal Government*, US State Department, 26 June 2009.

⁵ Under siege from Al-Qaeda, Somalia pleads for help, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 26 June 2009; *Somalia: International Military and Policing Assistance to should be reviewed*, AFR 52/001/2010, January 2010.

⁶ Senior UN envoy seeks 'Green Zone' for Somalia, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 31 July 2009.

⁷ *Somalia: Amnesty International calls for accountability and safeguards on arms transfers to Somalia's Transitional Federal Government*, AFR 52/006/2009, 11 August 2009.

⁸ *Somalia: International Military and Policing Assistance to should be reviewed*, AFR 52/001/2010, January 2010.

⁹ Somalia - Prime Minister Discusses TFG Troop Integration Plans and Support to Juba, Cable 09NAIROBI2132, 7 October 2009.

¹⁰ "The Prime Minister was grateful for the two small shipments of ammunition supplied by the Djibouti government. Some of the ammunition, however, was not compatible with the TFG weapons, while the small number of RPG shells provided only a few days' supply for TFG troops, however." Somalia - Prime Minister Describes TFG Opponents,

Djibouti informed the US Department of State that the Government of Djibouti would “made no request for the USG to defray the cost of this Djiboutian military aid to the TFG”¹¹.

Other aid to the TFG includes training of the security forces. The Djibouti Armed Forces have been training Somali contingents while meanwhile pleading the US Government to provide adequate weapons to these forces.¹² On 10 April 2010 the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) was launched and is based in Western Uganda. In 2014 training activities should shift to Mogadishu.¹³ Prior to the establishment of EUTM France was already involved in training activities in Djibouti.¹⁴ Also Italy had pledged training at the Vicenza European Gendarmerie Force headquarters. Meanwhile the TFG Foreign Minister was urging the United States to get assistance from the UAE, Kuwait, and Turkey “with which [the USG] has much influence”. The TFG Foreign Minister “noted that aid from the UAE could come more quickly and have fewer strings attached to it than assistance from western donors”¹⁵

Now the UN’s Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group has told the Security Council that some shipments of weapons from Uganda and Djibouti could not be accounted for. The Group said that it had “identified a number of issues and concerns over current management of weapons and ammunition stockpiles” by the Somali armed forces adding that this pointed to “high level and systematic abuses in weapons and ammunition management and distribution” and concluding with the observation that one key adviser to the Somali President has been involved in planning weapons deliveries to Al Shabaab.¹⁶

Various sources, including the US Department of State and the White House¹⁷, confirm that the US government has transferred millions of dollars’ worth of arms and ammunition to the interim Somali government over the past five years. So far the European Union has not provided any weapons or ammunition, but the EU is a major sponsor of AMISOM. Over €580 million has been contributed by the EU to AMISOM since its launch in March 2007 through the African Peace Facility (APF).¹⁸ Therefore of particular interest in this regard is the text of a 2009 cable from the US Embassy in Kenya to the State Department which said, in part, “Sharif voiced his profound gratitude for USG support, including the recent press release issued by the Department and a May 14 Embassy press release. Needed now, he said, was money so that his TFG could pay its troops, and purchase weapons and ammunition. Sharif agreed with us that AMISOM stood ready to supply small caliber ammunition. AMISOM did not have in its stocks, however, ammunition for heavier weapons, Sharif said. (Embassy has been told separately that the TFG needs ammunition for RPG-7s, 12.7 mm rounds, 37mm AA rounds, 81/82 mm mortar rounds, 60

Unrealized Financial Pledges by International Community, Efforts at Financial Transparency, Cable 09NAIROBI1112, 5 June 2009.

¹¹ “Djibouti had provided military assistance in response to Sharif’s request, Youssouf said on May 23, but “not much” (pas grande chose). Echoing what Djiboutian Chief of Defense Forces Fathi Ahmed Houssein told Ambassador and DCM on May 20, Youssouf said the GODJ’s small stock of arms and ammunition must be husbanded in case of another incursion from Eritrea. In a subsequent conversation on May 25, however, Youssouf said that the GODJ had dispatched a second small shipment of military assistance to the TFG either earlier that day or the day before. He made no request for the USG to defray the cost of this Djiboutian military aid to the TFG.” Djibouti FONMIN on Support to Somali Government, Cable 09DJIBOUTI555, 25 May 2009.

¹² Djibouti/Somalia: GODJ Deputy Chod Updates Plans to Train TFG Forces, Cable 09DJIBOUTI765, 23 June 2009; Somalia: Djibouti Underscores Need for Weapons for TFG Troops Being Trained, Cable 09DJIBOUTI1201, 11 October 2009.

¹³ EUTM-Somalia Mission Statement (http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eutm-somalia/mission-description/index_en.htm)

¹⁴ Somalia: Djibouti Underscores Need for Weapons for TFG Troops Being Trained, Cable 09DJIBOUTI1201, 11 October 2009.

¹⁵ Somalia - Foreign Minister Describes Efforts to Get Assistance for the TFG, Cable 09NAIROBI735, 11 April 2009.

¹⁶ U.N. monitors warn of ‘systematic’ Somali arms diversion, *Reuters*, 13 February 2014.

¹⁷ “Pursuant to the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, including section 503(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, and section 3(a)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act, as amended, I hereby find that the furnishing of defense articles and defense services to the Federal Republic of Somalia will strengthen the security of the United States and promote world peace.” *Presidential Memorandum -- Presidential Determination on Eligibility of the Federal Republic of Somalia to Receive Defense Articles and Defense Services under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended, and the Arms Export Control Act, as Amended*, Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 4 April 2013.

¹⁸ http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eutm-somalia/mission-description/index_en.htm

mm mortar rounds, 75 mm recoilless rounds, FALL G3s ammunition, and 145 mm AA rounds.) Some of this ammunition, Sharif thought, could be purchased in Mogadishu's markets if cash were available"¹⁹.

This diversion to international terrorists of US military aid will further add to the controversy surrounding such deliveries since similar problems have been adduced in the past with such shipments. Some are now advocating enhanced safeguards for the delivery of such hardware with suggestions including the use of so-called 'smart technology' so that weapons supplied to one group could be disabled by remote control if they subsequently fell into unauthorised hands.²⁰

About the Authors

Brian Johnson-Thomas first wrote about weapons and Somalia in February 1992. More recently he was the Arms Expert on the UN Security Council's Expert Panel for the Sudan between 2010 and 2013. Peter Danssaert was an Expert member of the UN Security Council's Panel on the D.R. Congo between 2006 and 2009. They have both collaborated also on projects for many other international organisations including NATO, the OSCE and the EU.

¹⁹ Somalia - President Sharif Describes Current Fighting, Requests Immediate Aid, Cable 09NAIROBI970, 14 May 2009.

²⁰ D.R. Weiss: *Smart gun technologies: One method of eliminating unauthorized firearm use*, Sandia National Laboratories, 1994; D.R. Weiss: *Smart Gun Technology Project Final Report*, Sandia National Laboratories, SAND96-1131, May 1996; John W. Wirsbinski: *"Smart Gun" Technology Update*, Sandia National Laboratories, SAND2001-3499, September 2001; L. Mearian: Could smart gun technology make us safer? 21 December 2012 (<http://www.mis-asia.com/print-article/25579>); With high-tech guns, users could disable remotely, 22 May 2013 (<http://www.mis-asia.com/print-article/35164>); M. Greene: *A Review of Gun Safety Technologies*, National Institute of Justice Research, June 2013; *"Authorized User Recognition" (a.k.a. "Smart Gun") Technology*, National Shooting Sports Foundation, November 2013; B. Johnson-Thomas: "How to address problems of diversion and illegal transfers of arms?" in: *Smart Technology in SALW Control-Civilian Protection, the UN-PoA, and Transfer Control (SmartCon)*, BICC Brief 49, December 2013. 'Smart technology' also adds new dangers. The US company TrackingPoint has developed so-called Precision Guided Firearms. The firearms are equipped with the latest high-tech optics, CPU's, gyroscopes, etc. to create "deadly, long-range accuracy" sniper rifles: "At upwards of \$22,000 a pop the PGF isn't (currently) mass-market technology, but we nonetheless have a rifle that can automatically nail a kill shot at a mile and a half away. No training required" [A. Wawro: TrackingPoint's sensor-packed smart gun redefines the term 'point and shoot', 1 August 2013 (<http://www.mis-asia.com/print-article/40738>)].